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NOTES FROM THE BEAR LINE

There were enough fair days during winter and early spring to make it a good season for zoo visitors and therefore a good one for zoo bears, who enjoy their public. The National Zoo's collection is noteworthy from a scientific viewpoint, certainly. But the burly characters on the main bear line also provide just about the best free show going for those who come solely for entertainment, caring little about genus or the fine points of hybridization. Who teaches a huge bear to sink gravely back on its haunches and rear up to a startling sitting position? Some digging and questioning unearthed the answer to this and other riddles about bears, -- both our bears and the less privileged ones left in the wild.

The bear family includes the largest of all carnivores, but with the exception of the polar bear they normally consume less meat than such smaller relatives as the dog or wolf. When fish or game is handy it is relished, but only the polar bear is inclined to be an aggressive hunter. In the frozen Arctic haunts he stalks seal, baby walrus and other wild prey as well as carrion. He has also been known to hunt humans when pressed by hunger. Most bears, however, will leave man alone unless provoked.

Bears are flat-footed lumbering carnivores, zoologically placed between the dog and raccoon families. With two exceptions (South American spectacled bear and Malayan sun bear) they are dwellers of the Northern Hemisphere. All are good swimmers, all have the characteristic thick coat, round ears and short stumpy tail. Their eyesight is poor but their sense of smell exceedingly sharp. Bears do not truly hibernate. Although they slumber in cold winter weather, both pulse and respiration remain close to normal. They can awaken and are often seen stumbling about the forest as if they had bad hangovers. Male polar bears remain active throughout the winter. As for our bears in the National Zoo, they tend to carry on with relatively little torpor except during the coldest weather.

Cubs are born to their half-awake mothers during the winter sleep. They are tiny mites compared to their hefty parents, weighing between six ounces and two pounds depending on the size and species of the parent. They grow quickly in the months before spring tempts mother and brood outdoors.

Bears have provided amusement -- often gory in nature -- since ancient times. They were favorite additions to the menageries kept by Roman emperors and were often pitted against armed men in the Colosseum. According to Plutarch, bears were brought from Britain to Rome for the purpose. In the early days of our own West, grizzlies were sometimes chained to stakes and then freed to battle with maddened bulls. The almost legendary "Grizzly" Adams gave up shoemaking to train and exhibit bears. He rode and wrestled them, using them as pack animals and, according to some accounts, engaged in bare-handed boxing matches. He eventually died of injuries inflicted by bears.

As zoo animals, bears have fared better and have proved that they can be interesting to visitors by "being themselves" without benefit of freak acts. Until recent years, however, it was difficult to house the powerful animals in ways that would provide both for the well-being of the bears and the general safety of the public. Until the late 19th century they were commonly kept in pits. More up-to-date quarters, such as ours at the National Zoo, afford space, air and sun as well as dens that might be the sweetest of dreams for a sleepy wild bear -- all this and private swimming pools.

Zoo bears have the singular benefit of an ever-admiring public. They are star performers, as everyone knows, rearing back on their haunches, perhaps with paw in mouth, to plead for treats. Nobody trains them for their act. Most bears pick up the tricks by themselves, often within a few weeks after arrival from the wild. It takes an old pro like Willie, the Zoo's enormous hybrid, to perfect a routine, however. This one will sometimes retrieve an especially valuable tidbit that lands outside his cage by splashing enough water from his pool to flood the gutter, thus washing the morsel back inside. Recently this writer spent a delightful half-hour or so along the bear line, armed with a box of day-old hot-dog rolls. Although Willie was in fine form, the big Kodiak, Mark, stole the show. Mark danced. Some have since doubted it, but this writer knows that Mark was performing a shuffling sort of three- and four-footed samba. It was admittedly flat-footed, but it continued for a good five minutes, long after the supply of hot-dog rolls was gone. One wonders what would happen along bear row with a bit of discotheque music piped in.

Visitors flock to see Smokey, the celebrated black bear rescued as a cub from a 1950 New Mexico forest fire. Before retiring -- or rather, before beginning a new life at the National Zoo -- he became world-famous through poster representations of him in his outfit of blue jeans and ranger hat, pleading for care to prevent forest fires. Unfortunately, those who come to see Smokey often catch no glimpse. As if chagrined by the thought of facing the public without his familiar blue trousers on, he is apt to remain aloof. Some say he is anti-social. Others claim he's just been too long in the Government, and good civil servants just don't go capering about making displays of themselves. Those who know Smokey better, however, say he's really a charmer when you get to know him, and especially when you learn of his addiction for peanut butter and honey sandwiches.

Although Smokey is a national celebrity, the bears that first brought fame to the National Zoological Park are the hybrids. In 1936, when three cubs were born to a polar bear father and an Alaskan brown bear mother, it was considered a startling event. Three years later, the Zoo announced the birth of two more of the rare hybrids. Most authorities were sure that the hybrids themselves would prove sterile. Not so! The National Zoo has succeeded in breeding its hybrids and in rearing many of their cubs over the past 30 years. Specimens have gone on to other zoos here and abroad to become prized exhibits. Willie, incidentally, is one of the pair born in 1936.

Speaking of cubs, the Animal Department office has allowed the writer to explain some recent cage-swapping along the bear line. The pair of grizzlies has been assigned to the large cubbing cage. There is no assurance of great events in advance because, as the office was quick to point out, it is usually difficult to tell about bears. All that fur and natural padding.

There is another news item from the bear line, one which must be told with certain regrets. Albert "Smitty" Smith, headkeeper for so long, retired at the end of December. Smitty knew his bears, gave them all the best with affection added. It would be hard to measure the extent to which his skilled handling contributed to making them the beguiling characters that charm the Zoo-going public. He surely brought out the best in them. Smitty is missed, but all who knew him join in wishing him happy days ahead.

When winter closes in the crowds thin out along the bear line as visitors confine their attentions to the interiors of heated buildings. But with the coming of spring and the first warm days in March, the peanut-begging

business begins to pick up. Willie is again going through his paces and Mark is once more dancing. Down the line in Anna's warm den are this year's crop of European brown bears -- three cuddly little cubs who will make the bear line even more appealing as soon as mama thinks they're big enough to come out in the sunshine. SPOTS & STRIPES wishes the bears an especially good season and hopes that the days will be filled with plenty of peanut butter and honey.

Jocelyn Arundel

THAT SECOND BABY,

I hear tell, always comes along so much more calmly than the first-born -- without quite so much nervousness and apprehension. And apparently it's true of tigers too. At least so it seemed with Mohini's second litter born on February 5th. Not, mind you, that Zoo personnel didn't take the same careful prenatal precautions (extra vitamin-supplemented rations, etc.), install the closed-circuit TV camera, keep an all-night watch beginning a week before cubs were due, and do everything humanly possible to guard our Enchantress from all disturbances. But this time it did seem a little bit easier -- on everybody.

Unhappily, the first of the two cubs was stillborn, but the second kitten is thriving under Mohini's care and protection. As a matter of fact, baby made her public debut on February 28th, some two weeks before Mohini's first litter was allowed to look at all those funny-looking ooohing and aahing people out front.

This little kitten is a female and orange-colored like her father, Samson. A number of people have exclaimed "What a tragedy the cub isn't white." But we really don't think so. Half of all of Mohini's cubs are expected to be normal-colored tigers. What would be a tragedy would be no cubs at all!

It's truly worth a trip to the Zoo just to see this plump wobbly tigerlet -- and next door, an equally appealing, same-vintage lion, Princess' 24th cub.

SEMANTICS

The series of events leading up to this story are involved, so, for the sake of brevity, let us just say that one of the smaller American zoos purposely requested -- and received as a gift -- a hybrid macaque which was on our surplus list. Much to our consternation we received a letter from the small zoo saying that they were returning our gift as it was a Java monkey, not a hybrid macaque, and they did not have room for it. To say that we were astonished would be minimizing the effect this statement had on the Animal Department. We carefully checked the animal's genealogy and Animal Department Manager Don Dietlein wrote the zoo stating that the monkey we had sent them was a cross between "Girly", a crab-eating macaque, and "Stratosphere Mike," a Philippine macaque. He went on to say that "Stratosphere Mike" rode in a rocket from Holloman Air Force Base, Alamogordo, New Mexico, 200,000 feet into the upper atmosphere back in 1958, making him sort of a simian celebrity.

The response to that letter was a telegram saying that the Java monkey was being returned to the National Zoological Park by plane. Our consternation knew no bounds! In all the history of the Zoo, never had a gift been returned and besides, this was such a nice monkey!

About two days later the hybrid macaque was back in his original cage, no doubt a bit mystified about why he had been selected for a round-trip air vacation. His return to the Zoo was followed a day later by a letter from the small zoo, in which they unabashedly related that they were terribly embarrassed and all faces were very red, but they had just found out that "macaque" was not another spelling of "macaw!"

Billie Hamlet

INTRODUCING

Divisional Headkeeper of Small Mammals, Bert J. Barker

How can we ever describe soft-spoken Bert Barker? warm? friendly? personable? skillful and competent? Decidedly yes -- and then some! To anyone who knows Bert, it's hard to imagine how the Zoo could manage without him. "Small mammals" is at best a general classification, for Bert's charges range from pee-wee marmosets to the gorillas, bears, baboons, and big cats, and there's no doubt about the fact that he adores and worries about each and every one. While he plays no favorites, Bert does keep an eagle eye on our regal white tigress, for it was Bert who went to India with Dr. Reed and selected Mohini Rewa from her littermates. Incidentally, if you're ever talking to Bert -- and can bear to switch the conversation away from animals -- ask him to tell you about this trip around the world, and a native Marylander's first bouts with birds' nest soup, geisha girls, and official speech-making. Although not one to eagerly volunteer when it comes to oratory, Bert will, at the drop of a hat, stay up all night (for as many nights as it takes) if one of his animals needs him. And this he did, along with Veterinarian Clint Gray and others, when Mohini's cubs were born. As we said in the first issue of SPOTS & STRIPES, "Mr. Barker certainly knows his cats." Now it's time to add "and all the other creatures in his domain, too."

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Special Assistant to the Director, Nels Werner III

Exactly one year ago, on this same page, Donald R. Dietlein was introduced as new Special Assistant. Since then, we are pleased to announce, Don has moved up to Manager of the Animal Department, but for a long time Dr. Reed has sorely felt the need of someone capable to help ease the voluminous load of work in the Director's Office. This January 3rd he found his man, and Nels Werner joined the Zoo staff.

Last year, Don's introduction began ... "The National Zoological Park, it seems, has a natural propensity for acquiring handsome, charming, highly qualified men. Latest member of the Zoo team rating 100 per cent on all these qualifications is" History does repeat itself, for personable Nels Werner certainly fills this bill.

Born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, Nels majored in conservation and biology at Wisconsin State College at Stevens Point, graduating in 1959. Since that time, he has completed his major course work at Michigan State University and will receive his Master's degree in Park Administration at the end of this year.

Nels also has another fine attribute. Pretty Mrs. Cindy Werner is a staunch Zoo-ophile. What more could we ask?

Marion McCrane

SOMETHING MISSING?

from this issue? You bet! Editor Lucy Mann and regular contributors Jocelyn Arundel and Billie Hamlet are enjoying a 5-week vacation tour that would make the firmest stay-at-homer's mouth water -- Russia, India, Nepal, Egypt and Italy. (Jocelyn and Billie were good enough to write their stories before they left.) Just the other day a letter arrived from Mrs. Mann in Katmandu, giving us a glimpse of their adventures. We'll share it with you.

... "Moscow was cold (below zero) but sparkling and beautiful in the snow. I saw great improvement over conditions in 1938 when I was there. We were allowed inside the Kremlin, for instance; and men and women in fur hats and fur-collared coats looked much more prosperous. We had three days of sight-seeing and were entertained lavishly. Took off at midnight in a blinding snowstorm that would have closed down any airport in the States, and headed for Delhi. Delhi airport was closed by fog, so we flew to Bombay and spent 5 hours in the "transit lounge" there. Reached Delhi 7 hours late, and had less than an hour to shed our Moscow boots and woollies and attire for a cocktail party given by the head of Air India. Regal setting in a striped pavilion with Oriental rugs on the ground, curtains made of countless strings of marigolds, beautiful ladies in saris, jewels and white mink stoles. Our hostess wore a diamond in her nose.

"To bed at midnight after 40 hours of no sleep. Woke refreshed and spent most of the day at the airport waiting for the fog to lift for the flight to Katmandu. No luck, so back, bag and baggage, to the hotel for the night. We made it the next day, and changed at the (Katmandu) airport to a DC-3 headed for Tiger Tops. Two blissful days there. Our mahogany and bamboo house was built high in a kapok tree, and we looked across the Rapti River to the 26,000-foot high peaks of the Annapurna range. Rode elephants through the jungle and through grass 20 feet high, but saw no tigers or rhinos. My elephant was a big tusker whose name translated means "Beloved of God." He was marvelously clever and cautious. Went out on the river in a motor boat to watch the sunset turn the snow-capped mountains rosy pink. Crocodiles and porpoises in the river. Went out at night, with a big spotlight on the Landrover, and saw 4 species of deer. Left Tiger Tops regretfully via Landrover and elephant to a grassy air strip where we got a small plane with bucket seats to bring us back to Katmandu.

"We are staying in the old Royal Hotel, a drafty barn that was once a palace (full of atmosphere in more than one sense). Here is the Yak and Yeti bar. Good food. We were here on February 18th, National Day and also a Hindu holy day, the name of which I can't spell. We spent the afternoon watching a colorful parade that included cavalry, foot soldiers, floats, a

whirling dervish, and all sorts of groups, down to Boy Scouts. The King and all foreign ambassadors were there.

"Yesterday we drove up into the mountains over a hair-raising narrow road to get a gorgeous view of the mountains. In the afternoon we went to Prash-putinath, the sacred temple of the Hindus. Not only were Nepalese there, but many Tibetans and Indians, one holy man from as far away as Madras. Pilgrims bathed and washed their clothes in the river. There were burning ghats, one of them functioning. People and temples equally fascinating, and nobody objects to having their pictures taken.

"The city is as picturesque as I had imagined and the people delightful. They remind me very much of the Malays. It is surprising how many of them speak English, and they are so gracious and anxious to please.

"Most of us have just stayed in a haze of perpetual delight. I am writing this sitting in the sun in a marble pergola, looking out on a great mass of trumpet vine. Jonquils, sweet peas and yellow jasmine are in bloom. How I wish you could come with us! Just one thrill after another ... "

Never fear, Mrs. Mann and Mrs. Hamlet will be back in Washington (we hope) on March 14th, so the June issue of SPOTS & STRIPES will be back in its usual form.

HALLOWEEN GIBBON

When you come down to see the cubs, be sure to walk out the back door of the lion house and past the gibbon cage. Here, too, is a baby, "Spook," born last October 31st. Although 4 months old, it is still very much of an infant, carried protectively by its mother, for young gibbons (typical of all the great apes) develop slowly. When old enough to begin venturing off on his own, Spook may follow precedent set a season ago by older brother and romp through nearby trees until called back home by mother -- and of course, until too big to slip out between the bars.

MAYBE

No promises, mind you, but the Zoo has hopes for a good crop of babies this year. Hopefully expected may be baby orangutans, giraffe calves, a big-horn sheep lamb, a gorilla, and one or two ever-welcome pygmy hippos, which are, as someone once said, "24-carat zoo currency." Keep your fingers crossed.

SICK LIST

Assistant to the Director, Travis Fauntleroy, was recently hospitalized for some major surgery and will be out for 4 to 6 weeks. We miss him and wish him a speedy recovery and a quick return to feeling fine again.



TV AND THE ZOO

The Zoo is always glad to cooperate with Channel 26 (WETA) and assist, if possible, in providing material for their educational shows. Over the years, Zoo personnel, often with animals, have participated in a number of programs.

Last summer, when WETA first acquired their impressive portable TV truck unit, the Zoo was chosen for the first taping trial, and a 15-minute program on bears was made. This, along with a 15-minute one on the big cats, will be shown sometime this spring on "Window on our World," a weekly morning program for elementary school children.

Also coming up in the not too distant future is a half-hour show on the "What's New?" program: a day in the life of a zoo veterinarian -- our Dr. Clinton W. Gray. This is a really fine film, for Clint and the WETA crews spent considerable time and effort taping a variety of medical problems with which a zoo vet must cope -- anesthetizing, then doing some dental work on a giraffe; treating an elephant's sore foot; casting a monkey's broken arm, and so forth.

Unfortunately, it is not yet known exactly when these programs will be shown, but they will be listed, so keep checking WETA's program schedules.

CONSTRUCTION NEWS & NOTES

The construction program progresses as the hoofed-stock area takes shape north of the bird house and the deer paddocks get finishing touches prior to moving in a number of species of cervids. It is expected that the deer area will be stocked with animals by late spring and the new hoofed stock enclosures will be ready for occupancy by late summer or early fall.

If you're wondering what's going on in Beaver Valley (where the sealions, wild dogs and tapirs live), a sewer line is being installed. All of Beaver Valley is now under construction and will be for several months. However, it is hoped that this work will be completed by late spring, so summer visitors should again be able to enjoy that lovely part of the Park.

Cover credits: The bear pictures on the cover of this issue are the Zoo's hybrid bears going through their begging antics. Most are of Willie who has such a marvelous repertoire of poses. The bear waving and sucking its paw is Pokodiak, the female hybrid next door. All photos are by Smithsonian Institution photographers.

Editor of this issue of SPOTS & STRIPES: Marion P. McCrane